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L. B.

With the Author's
kind regards

ALFRED,

A Drama.

BY

SIR COUTTS LINDSAY, BART.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS,

PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1845.

APA4646

LONDON:
Printed by A. STOTTISWOOD,
New-Street-Square.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SAXONS.

KING ALFRED.

EDMUND, *his Nephew.*

EARLS OF KENT, DEVON, BERKS, AND WILTS.

ALICE.

ULF, }
GODWIN, } *Foresters.*

DENULF, *an old Peasant—husband of*

SWERTHA.

SOLDIERS, FORESTERS, ATTENDANTS, &c.

DUNSTAN, *an ancient Hermit.*

GURTH, *a wounded Soldier.*

DANES.

GUTHRUM, *the King.*

EDUNA, *the Queen.*

SEDROCK, }
UBBO, } *and other Lords.*
SWEYN, }

ASKE, *Priest of Odin.*

DANISH HARPER.

SOLDIERS, ATTENDANTS, &c.

FAIRIES, ELVES, WITCHES, WARLOCKS, &c.

SCENE, *Taunton, in Somersetshire, Ethelingay and the neighbouring
Forests,—And the Danish Camp.*



A L F R E D.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A green Glade of the Forest — Village in the distance — Rural Games going on — Time after Sunset, the light gradually fading away — Village Bells distantly ringing. — GODWIN, DENULF, ALICE, and SWEETHA under an aged oak, in front ; in the interior of the stage, ULF and FORESTERS playing at Quoits.

DENULF.

Alice, why sing you not ? so calm an eve
Doth well deserve a song. Cheer up, dear soul !

ALICE.

A jocund heart needs not to sing aloud,
It bears a tacit music in itself ;
But if it be not merry, the sad notes

That it perforce might give, are better kept
Unchorded and untuned.

ULF.

Bring back my quoits ! Come, Godwin ! join our game.

FIRST FORESTER.

That was good — now for a ringer !

[*Throws a quoit.*]

Ha ! ha ! I have it — I think the game's at odds.

GODWIN.

Sweet Alice ! be not sad.

ALICE.

I have no cause,

No cause for sadness —

And yet by sighing I do ease my heart.

(*Second Forester plays.*)

ULF.

Wide ! wide !

FIRST FORESTER.

Ay, 'twas the wind.

SWERTHA.

Sing, thou foolish girl !

Thou wert not made to mope away thy days,
It will be time enough when thou grow'st old.

ULF (*to* SECOND FORESTER).

Will you play again ?

SECOND FORESTER.

No, these quoits are light.

ULF.

I think 'tis you are heavy.

ALICE (*to* SWERTHA).

What shall I sing ? I will e'en do my best
To give you pleasure. — (I have heard her say
That the prophetic soul will feel the shade
Of coming griefs, — I fear 'tis so with mine.)

[*Aside.*

ULF.

Dear Alice, do not grieve !

ALICE.

He calls me dear —

[Aside, and sings.]

Welcome ever, lusty Spring !

For beside thee joy is tripping ;

Winter at thy birth takes wing,

With his frost and North-wind nipping ;

Thine it is to brighten gloom

Into laughing youth and bloom.

Love is foremost in Spring's train,

Touching all hearts with his dart,

Giving pleasure e'en by pain,

For in love the heart will smart ;

Healing it as quick again,

Or his labour would be vain.

ULF.

Well sung, Alice ! — and now for our song : —

FOUR FORESTERS, ULF LEADING.

Brown Autumn is the only time

That is worth a care from man,—

When the buck is in his prime,

And the oaks are red and tan,

When the frost begins to bite,

And the swallow takes his flight.

To the buck who bounds away

From a hoary copse, his cover,

Or a nine-tynd stag at bay,

I'm a firm and constant lover ;

The buck I woo with a singing shaft,

The stag with my hunting-blade and haft.

What's the singing of a bard

To the chiding of my hound ?

The sweetest music ever heard

Is the bugle's merry sound —

Never note e'er rang so true

As the twanging of my yew.

FORESTER (*breaking in*).

Who would feed on fatted beef

When that venison's had for killing ?

But it passes all belief

How some asses are found willing

To barter all our forest joys

For wife and children and such toys !

[*Foresters laugh — short pause, and*

OLD MAN *continues* :

With me the dream of life is o'er,

My Spring and Summer-time have flown ;

Gone is my Autumn's fruitful store,

And I am comfortless and lone ;

In Spring I loved, in Summer wed,

My Autumn's store, my son, is dead !

CHORUS.

Curst be the men that did the deed,

And curst the land from whence they came !

Upon their hearths, oh Famine, breed —

And, Infamy, go bruit their name !



With bloody hands they strive to gain
Our England now — curst be the Dane !
(*A pause.*)

ULF.

Music is sweeter when the sun is set ;
I think to-night the moon is near the full.

GODWIN.

She's rising now betwixt those aged elms.

ALICE.

Hush, hush ! the wind is charged with distant clamour !
The merry village-bells have ceased their round !

ULF.

I hear it not.

GODWIN.

'Tis but the beetle's drone.

ALICE.

It mounts the breeze, and sinks with every breath.

ULF.

Hark ! give me my bow !

ALICE (*to ULF.*)

Oh be not rash !

GODWIN.

We cannot shoot to night — hark, how it thunders !

ULF.

I think it sounds like thunder of the Danes ;

We'll make a stand and give the dogs a lesson.

(*Alarm-bell rings.*)

SWERTHA.

O Heaven, help us ! let us to the woods —

Come, Alice ! come, I say.

[*Exit, with Women.*]

ULF (*to ALICE*).

Go, follow them.

Alice, why fly you not ?

ALICE.

I do not fear.

ULF.

Go and seek safety.

ALICE.

I feel safer here.

GODWIN.

Dear Alice, I must force you from this spot.

ALICE.

No, no — I cannot go.

ULF.

Are your bows strung?

Come on ! let's keep together.

GODWIN.

The bells have stopt,

'Tis useless to resist, the village burns.

ULF.

Why then go fly with Alice — I shall stay —

This is no place for her.

GODWIN (*to ALICE*).

Beseech you !

PEASANTS (*running across*).

Fly, fly!

GODWIN.

Oh fly with me — I will protect you!

ALICE.

You are a man, and should remain to fight;
I will go alone.

ULF.

Quick! or 'twill be too late —

H! who are these?

[*Old woman flies across the stage, with a child in her arms — she falls shot.*]

DENULF.

Help, help! they murder all!

ALICE (*to ULF*).

See, I cannot fly — I will stay by you.

ULF.

—'Sdeath! we are surrounded —

Give them a flight of arrows, and let's charge.

Draw and shoot point-blank!

[*Shout within, and screams.*]

ALICE.

Oh God, he'll leave me !

ULF.

The bloody dogs! I will not stand to see
Men butchered thus—
Ah! they got it there—forwards!

*Enter the Danes—ULF and the Saxons rush to encounter
them—a Dane seizes ALICE, who flies to ULF for
protection.*

ULF.

Ha! down, dog !

*[Cuts him down.]**Enter UBBO.*

UBBO.

Take that, foul churl!

[Dashing ULF to the ground.]

Spare neither man nor child.

ALICE.

'Tis done! just so—oh heavens! I knew 'twould
come!

He's dying!—Turn, you crimson tide! leave not

So fair a mansion to pale death, — stay, stay !

I'll staunch you with my hair, my hands, my heart !

[Vainly endeavouring to staunch the wound.]

Vain, vain ! — And dare I say 'tis vain ? he breathes !

[Saxons driven away — UBBO seizes ALICE as if to kill her.]

I would die so ! Part me not from him !

UBBO.

Seize her and bear her hence.

ALICE (*turning to UBBO*).

I will not go !

UBBO.

Bear her away. — How beautiful !

SOLDIER (*aside*).

This is the first life e'er I saw him spare.

UBBO.

Seize every Saxon by the throat and slay him.

[Exeunt all, except the wounded. The light fades entirely, and the moon gradually rises above the elms. Distant music, which approaches.]

Enter CHORUS OF FAIRIES singing :—

Wanderers with the evening star,
Sleepers in the floweret's breast,
Elves! attend, from near and far,
Join with us in merry jest;
From earth and air, from fire and sea,
Join with us right merrily!

Ring the bluebell, loudly blow,
Ye gnats! your trumpets keen;
Bid the nightworm's lanthorn glow,
While fire-flies dance between;
The nightingale is softly singing,
Whilst the hills response are ringing.

FIRST FAIRY.

What bloody work is this? our revels spoiled!
Where is our Queen?

2

SECOND FAIRY.

Hush! she is grieving sore;
For she beholds the delicate soft green
Of her dear circlets stained with clotted gore;

B

The King, he gnaws his thumbs for very spleen —

But here they come, so I will say no more.

Enter ELF KING and FAIRY QUEEN, with their Trains.

ELF KING.

Come hither, Elf.

ELF.

I wait your highness' pleasure.

ELF KING.

My blood is turned to gall — Hist! in thine ear.

[They whisper

SECOND FAIRY.

Poor mortals! What frail insects have we here!

FAIRY QUEEN.

Mere bubbles are they from the foam of Time,

Wafted along by every breath that blows,

Bright as the rainbow in their day's first prime,

But dark when it is drawing to a close;

Like the chamelion, not a hue that's there

But varies with a thought while chance turns on,—

They for the scanty goods of Fortune's fair

Hurtle each other, burst — and they are gone,

FIRST FAIRY.

There is a heaven for them !

FAIRY QUEEN.

Speak not of that !

SECOND FAIRY.

Look here ! this crone is dead — the babe but sleeps,
Still through its half-oped eye life's spirit peeps.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Call it not death ! the drowsy fall of time
Has lulled these beings into deep repose —
This, like a mossy rose in spring's first prime,
That, like a withered leaf in autumn's close ;
Old age and childhood, innocence and crime !
— Here, Crystal ! take this infant to my bower —
Nature has christened him with bright dew-drops,
And his pure orbs are like the violet's flower,
Whose closed eye a liquid pearl o'ertops ;
Take him and bear him thither.

CRYSTAL.

I obey.

ELF KING.

Who flies unbid from hence ? stay, spirit, stay !
Why go you hence without consent of me ?

CRYSTAL.

The Queen commanded — I am not to blame.

ELF KING.

How now ! why did you so ?

FAIRY QUEEN.

Am I not free ?

ELF KING.

And is thy memory so poor and lame ?
What is next full moon's eve ?

FAIRY QUEEN.

Why, let me see —

Yon blessed star, I do remember well,
Full seven years since enlightened yonder sky
Where now it burns, yet I can hardly tell
To the just day, — Ah me !

ELF KING (*whispers*).

The tine of Hell !

[*Fairies and Elves shriek wildly and crouch on the ground.*

FAIRY QUEEN.

Why tell me so? why bring such grief to mind?
Forgetfulness is bliss when memories pain.
Oh night of shame and sorrow!

ELF KING.

Take and bind

This infant's soul, and with it haste amain —

FAIRY QUEEN.

I will oppose you — stop! it shall not be.

ELF KING.

Ha! oppose me! I will drive thee to Hell!

FAIRY QUEEN.

There is an ancient bond thou gavest me;
I told thee once before, — thou knowest well
That I by it am free from thee and thine. —
Fairies! let's leave him to digest his spleen.

ELF KING.

Seven years for this I'll make thee peak and pine, —
Beware!

FIRST FAIRY.

Provoke him not, my sweetest queen!

ELF KING.

I'll have the child to pay the coming tine.

FAIRY QUEEN.

My fairies found him first ; the child is mine.

ELF KING.

No, 'twas my elves in truth ; leave him with me.

FAIRY QUEEN.

A fairy from my train paid Hell's last fine ;

'Tis your turn now.

ELF KING.

Indeed ! well, we shall see !

FIRST ELF.

Hist ! this bold form is living, for it moves !

[*Pointing to ULF.*

ELF KING,

'Tis so ; it breathes — my luck is on the rise, —

Keep then the child, my queen ! *this* soul I claim ;

Kiss me, my dearest ! this at least is mine —

I hate to make thee grieve.

[*Kisses her.*

FAIRY QUEEN.

That is not true.

ELF KING.

I love thee dearly.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Oh then, my lord !

By all the sweetest joys that we have known —
By our young love, when first you met with me
Along the sedgy banks of 'Tigris' stream,
(For I was then a spirit of its waves,) —
Where you did stray by me o'er mirrored stars,
Whispering love-verses to my willing ear ;
— Or by our nuptial joys in Fairy-land,
Where then the Syrens sang old songs of love —
All Nature in the jubilee did join ;
The breezes murmured to the music wild,
The streamlets gurgled to the potent song,
The planets, circling in their mystic dance,
Answered,
Whilst ever and anon the measured sea

Roared on the yellow shores — such ecstasy
Could not continue long ; it passed away !
— Husband, turn not thy back upon my suit !

ELF KING.

I guess the wish, but will not yield a jot.

FAIRY QUEEN.

For my sake spare me this poor mortal's life !

ELF KING.

Then give me up that babe !

FAIRY QUEEN.

That will I not.

ELF KING.

Then get thee gone, or we shall have more strife.

ULF (*reviving*).

Oh Jesu ! this is surely but a dream !

ELF KING.

We must be quick, or we shall be too late.

Elves ! bear him to my caverns.

[*Exeunt King and Elves bearing off Ulf.*



FAIRY QUEEN.

With grief how wholly woven is my lot !
Oh, I am sick at heart — no heaven ! for me
No bright futurity will ever dawn !
A careless joy is all I have in store,
The outside laughing of a reckless heart,
Which at the core chews bitter, bitter woe,
As ever constant food !

[Hides her face in her hands.]

Ay, it is so — we take the fearful road,
Sooner or later, to Hell's dismal shores ;
We have no Saviour, no appeased God —
Eternal death must come, eternal woe !
— But I must swallow down these madd'ning
thoughts —
Then come, light-headed joy and drunken glee !
Sear o'er this aching heart — that's all the peace for
me !
— The pang is over, I'm myself again.
Now help me, mother-wit ! to baulk the king,
(For I was born from out a mortal's womb,)

And do this little good. — So, to begin : —
Come hither, Mayflower !

MAYFLOWER.

Ready, dear lady !

FAIRY QUEEN.

I think I've heard thou hast a pert delight
 (Or else the world do much mistake thy trade)
Of prying into every good man's right
 Of tying love-knots, breaking them when made —
In short, thou hast a finger in each pie,
 And drivest by thy wit young Fortune's wheel ?

MAYFLOWER.

Those who do gossip this have told no lie,
 There's not a secret that I can't reveal ;
And pretty Fortune I've enthralled so
 That she my minion is, and flies by me.
What is't on earth or air that thou wouldst know ?
 Thou art my queen, and I do live for thee.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Thou saw'st a man lie bleeding on the earth, —
 But now the King hath borne him hence away ;
Tell me what stars presided o'er his birth ?

MAYFLOWER.

'Twas Mars alone shone on his destiny ;
Natheless there breathes a maid who loves him well,
As simple and as strong as love can be ;
If you wish aught with her, I soon can tell
Where she is couching — shall I go and see ?

FAIRY QUEEN.

Fly thy best pace, and then return to me.

[Exit MAYFLOWER.]

Ember, come hither !

EMBER.

Ay, lady.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Art thou advent'rous ?

EMBER.

In my duty.

FAIRY QUEEN.

There is a dangerous duty to be done.

EMBER.

Then I will do it with a wakeful heart,
Yet more for love of thee than for aught else.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Is't so, sweet subject? I fear to do thee hurt.

EMBER.

Sweet Madam, love is strong and full of wit
To serve the thing that's loved — fear not for me.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Well, well — 'tis this: — go spy our testy king,
Sit 'neath his elbow, dodge beneath his throne,
Haunt him where'er he goes, and listen well,
Whate'er he says come and report to me.

EMBER.

I cut the air before me as I flee.

[Exit EMBER.]

FAIRY QUEEN.

How now ! I'm full of joy — Fairies, let's see —

What steeds are ready in our lofty stalls?

A hundred mounted fays must ride with me

Next full moon's eve from out my palace-walls ;

Twenty with oaten pipes and shrill bog-reeds

Heart-stirring music to the winds will cast,

Then thirty more will come on snow-white steeds,
Then I do ride, and fifty black come last.
How is my noble horse ?

FOAM.

What, Dragonfly ?

He drinks the air and snorts it back in ire ;
Six fays attending him are always by,
Or he would burst away, — he's very fire.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Why that's my noble steed !
Put on his crimson housings, girth him tight,
For I will ride him till the morning's light, —
Meet me at break of day — till then, good night !

[Exeunt Fairies — Music dies away in the distance.]

Enter MAYFLOWER.

FAIRY QUEEN.

Well, Mayflower ! what sayest thou ?

MAYFLOWER.

In sad captivity the maid I found,
Grieving as silently as if she slept,
Stretch'd on the earth, her spirits all unbound,
And now and then a sob, as if she wept,
But the long fringes of her eyes were dry —
Whilst by her side there crouched a fever low ;
I kiss'd her eyne and bade the fever fly, —
Then through the half-shut orbs 'gan softly flow
A torrent of bright drops, which pity caught
And changed into diamonds with a thought.
— I swear 'tis true.

FAIRY QUEEN.

And I believe it truth.
I've heard that tears of innocence are kept
As minutes 'gainst the aggressor, who shall pay
With tears as hot as molten lead the debt
Which he heaps up against a coming day.
Now, Mayflower ! glide thou back to yonder may,
Taking the semblance of a vision strange ;

Upon her weary limbs soft slumber lay —

The past and future then before her range,
Both how the mortal has been seized by fays,
And how on full moon's eve he'll ride the wold : —
Tell her — But I do feel morn's chilly cold —
Away and tell her this.

MAYFLOWER.

The proudest mettled horse in speed I strip,
Yet want I neither reins, nor spurs, nor whip.
To do your bidding, queen ! see how I fly.

[*Exit.*

FAIRY QUEEN.

I must to Fairy-land immediately.

[*Exit to soft music.*

SCENE II.

ETHELINGAY, *clear part of the Forest — Saxon Camp — A large Stone Table, round which are seated ALFRED, EDMUND, EARLS OF KENT, WILTS, and BERKS. Day just beginning to dawn.*

Enter EARL OF DEVON and Attendant.

DEVON (*to Attendant*).

Where is the peasant who has brought these news?

ATTENDANT.

My lord, his wounds did call for instant help,
A leech attends him.

DEVON (*to ALFRED*).

Scarce an hour since a peasant youth came in,
Bedabbled o'er with blood and breathing hard ;
He asked for instant help, and said the Danes
Had set the country all around in flames ;
But most of all, with sobs and scalding tears,
He prayed me hard to rescue some poor girl,
And talked so wildly that I thought him mad.

ALFRED.

What followed then ?

DEVON.

Why, half awake, I leapt from off my couch,
Ordered out scouts, and mounted yonder hill —
Oh ! what a sight was there ! from west to east
The flames came rolling onward — wreaths of smoke
Topp'd the horizon — the world below me lay
In one infernal light, whilst on my ear
Rose sounds innumerable —
The voice of men, of flames, and clashing steel
Swayed on the breeze ; I am but just returned —
Look ! how heav'n blushes when such deeds are done !

[Pointing to the reflected red of the sky.]

EDMUND.

All this while we are vainly hiding here !

ALFRED (*to DEVON*).

Our foes, 'tis said, have newly formed a camp
Without the eastern circuit of the wood ;
Said you not so ?

[To a Peasant.]

PEASANT.

I said as much, my lord !
They press'd me into working of the ditch,
And after would have killed me for the pains,
But I by chance escaped, and straight came here.

KENT.

Bethink you well — what may their numbers be ?

PEASANT.

A hundred thousand, by the least account.

EDMUND.

Oh, what a gull !

PEASANT.

Sir, I speak truth — I heard it from themselves.

ALFRED.

Well, you may go — Reward him for his news.

[*To a Servant.*]

DEVON.

Ah ! yonder comes the peasant youth I spoke of.

Enter GODWIN, supported.

GODWIN.

'Tis now too late !

The precious time is past.

KENT.

Poor boy, he weeps !
For very shame dry up those woman's tears.

GODWIN.

Oh, it is well,
'Tis very well indeed for hearts at ease
To school a wretched soul : —
' Why laugh you not ? ' quoth heart's-ease to a jade ;
' I would i'sooth, only my heart is broken !'
— Too late, too late !

ALFRED.

Lead him away,
He is distraught.

GODWIN.

Sir, I am not distraught, —
Give me a body of your soldiery —
There is a chance yet — Sir, for love of grace . . .

ALFRED.

Poor youth, I cannot trust thee — help him hence !

GODWIN.

Oh, Alice ! Alice !

[*Led out.*]

EDMUND.

As we are Christians, now's the time to strike !

KENT.

We are too weak.

ALFRED.

I'm not so sure of that.

EDMUND.

Now bless thy soul, my uncle, for that word !

DEVON.

One hundred thousand men — we are not one
To three opponents.

ALFRED.

'Tis a common truth
That ignorance will add to cyphers aughts,
Making a petty sum show monstrous —
Thus fear makes fools see double. I will know
By my own eyes the truth. To-morrow eve

Have under arms our men — at vesper hour
I'll join you here. — My lord of Kent !

[Exeunt all but ALFRED and KENT.]

Three months we've waited for more certain news,
And still the truth is lost 'twixt mouth and mouth ;
Report breeds marvels by the hour — I cannot trust it.

KENT.

What can we trust, my lord ?

ALFRED.

Our own eyes, Kent !

I will myself visit this Danish camp,
And note their numbers and what guard they keep.
I go this noon.

KENT.

That were too rash, my liege !
Our hopes rest all on you ; if you were ta'en,
England were lost and won.

ALFRED.

My good old friend,
The time is come when we must win or lose, —
And as to risking of my single life,

I do it for an object worth the price.

— Besides,

How shall we feed our thirty thousand men?

We can no longer hide our growing strength

Within this desert wood? If we could learn

The point of best surprise, it would advantage us

More than a double increase of our men.

Surprise acts like cold water on the flame

Of wavering valour — it hisses and goes out.

KENT.

Let me go spy their camp.

ALFRED.

No, no, content you.

My orders are, that if by Providence

I fall a sacrifice for England's cause,

You take command, and lead the Saxon arms

To better fortunes in my nephew's right.

— Not another word — adieu!

[*Erit.*

KENT.

My liege! my liege!

He's very wilful, —

I'll follow and protect him. Cedric, ho!



Get ready a hundred spears and follow me —
Stay, which way went the king?

PAGE.

Yonder he gallops down the western glade.

KENT.

Quick! let them mount — the sun is up already.

[Exeunt — Scene closes whilst the sun is rising, and soldiers pass to and fro over the stage, as proceeding to their several employments — bugles blown, reveillies.]

SCENE III.

*Danish Camp — GUTHRUM's Tent — GUTHRUM, SWEYN,
Lords, and Attendants.*

GUTHRUM.

I'm very weary!

These hours are pacing on like lazy steeds;
Sure Odin's fast asleep. How goes the day?

FIRST LORD.

The sun is right above the central camp.

GUTHRUM.

What hour began the Saxon swine to delve?

FIRST LORD.

They worked the livelong night.

GUTHRUM.

Who ordered this?

SWEYN.

Sedrock, my lord.

GUTHRUM.

And why?

SWEYN.

He heard vague rumours that a Saxon force
Gathered i' the woods — they might surprise our
camp, —

The moat is not complete.

GUTHRUM.

So much the better, friend! why let them come!
Go bid the workmen cease.

SWEYN.

I will, my lord.

[*Exit.*

GUTHRUM.

Ubbo! what captives did you take last night?

Ubbo!—why, look! he stares on vacant air,

And does not hear me—see how he gnaws his glove—

What, Ubbo! valiant Dane!

UBBO.

My lord!

[*Starting.*

GUTHRUM.

Did you not hear me speak? I called you thrice.

UBBO.

My thoughts were wand'ring . . . much against my will.

[*Aside.*

GUTHRUM.

No doubt they crossed the fight, and if 'twere so,

I wish with all my heart I were with them;

This life's exceeding dull — you're all asleep.
What prisoners have you brought ? no doubt but few.

UBBO.

A girl —

FIRST LORD.

Why this is wonderful, my lords !
“ Ubbo the Thunderer,” who laughed at men
When they made mention of a woman's name,
Who thought no more of women than of toys
Given to infants, to be tossed aside
When they could feed themselves — this thunderer,
He says he took a girl !

[*The Lords laugh.*]

UBBO.

Jeer not at me.

GUTHRUM.

Why did you save her ?

UBBO.

She spoke of Alfred.

GUTHRUM.

Of Alfred, ha ? then I will see her straight.

They say he is a man, a worthy foe.

Send the girl hither, I will question her.

Enter an Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

My lord, the Queen entreats a word with you.

GUTHRUM.

My friends, go use your time ;

We meet again this afternoon to feast.

[Exeunt all except UBBO.]

UBBO.

I know not why 'tis so — I'm always jeered

To make them pastime, — I, who in war

Am first in every strife, in peace become

A sort of butt for witty marksmen's shots,

A kind of bugbear for young wits to bait.

I will not bear it ! I will spite the blood

Of him who next begins. And for this girl—

Ye Gods ! that I should love a Saxon maid !

SCENE IV.

EDUNA's Tent. GUTHRUM and EDUNA.

GUTHRUM.

You've dreamt this thing again ?

EDUNA.

Ay, my sweet lord.

GUTHRUM.

With every circumstance remirrored back ?

EDUNA.

As vivid as at the first.

GUTHRUM.

The third time too !

Repeat me o'er this dream, — 'tis very strange.

EDUNA.

As I told you a drowsy lethargy

Crept o'er my frame, my blood seemed clotted ice,

My limbs were in a vice, and wearily

My pulses beat, —

Time showed a blank, for light had fled my sight :—
Whilst thus entranced I lay —

GUTHRUM.

What hour was this?

EDUNA.

The bell had then told one —
Methought I stood on Hecla's icy top,
The northern winds swept by, and roared as loud
As doth the Maelstrom, struggling to get free
From some gigantic frost ; upon the winds
Came scattered past, spirits that shrieked and moaned,
Huddled together, or alone in woe, —
“ Who's that ? ” quoth I, “ who rides the whirlwind
there ? ”

For I beheld a spirit all in arms,
Who madly seemed to strive against the blast ;
Upon his helm there streamed a meteor wild,
And in his hand he reared a blasted pine ;
A moment, and no more, they seemed to fight
With equal force — “ I'm Odin ! ” shouted he —
Then driven backwards by the storm, he fell.

'Twas then he shouted twice on thee, my lord !
He called thee recreant, and bade thee turn
And help him in that plight,—you did not come,
And he was hurl'd into dark Hecla's pit.

GUTHRUM.

It is a damned lie, it cannot be —
He call'd me recreant, yet I came not? Tush !
Some cursed spirit made thee dream this thing.
I fear not Odin's self, invulnerable —
I'd fight him to the death !

EDUNA.

Offend him not !
Remember, 'twas a dream.

GUTHRUM.

Ay, that is true,
But it is lawful to encounter Gods.
— Well ! here I pledge myself, for Odin's joy,
That I will bring him bound the Saxon king,
Ta'en by this sword of mine. I've heard it said,
He wields his steel almost like Thor himself —



Enter ALICE, led by an Old Woman.

And Odin hath e'en now sent us a maid

Who shall inform us more.

— Maiden, what is your name ?

ALICE.

My name is Alice.

GUTHRUM.

You are a Christian ?

ALICE.

I strive to be one.

EDUNA.

Poor soul ! her eyes are glistening with bright drops ;

We're almost of an age, yet she looks very young —

What are your years, sweet girl ?

ALICE.

My life has passed

So quietly, I scarce kept count till now ;

Old Swertha tells me I have seen eighteen.

GUTHRUM.

Hush now, Eduna ! you usurp my time

With foolish babble, let me question her.

EDUNA.

I will do it for thee, thou speak'st too rough,
Thy tongue is trained for war, — you frighten her.

GUTHRUM.

Well, sweet one! have thy way.

EDUNA.

What wouldst thou ask ?

GUTHRUM.


Question her keenly as to Alfred's force, —
Ask, if she know it, what his inches are,
What weapons he doth bear, and every point
Whereby a man may say, Ay, that is he !

EDUNA.

I will, — I'll do it rarely. — Alice ! come hither, —
Be not afraid, — I am as weak as thou,
Though not perhaps so timid. Let me see —
How tall is Alfred ?

ALICE.

He equals yonder lord.



GUTHRUM.

I thank thee, Odin!—Thou hast seen him then?

ALICE.

Yes, sir.

GUTHRUM.

And know you where his men are hid?

EDUNA.

Hush! I am to question her, not you.—

What weapons wears he?

ALICE.

He carries but a sword.

EDUNA.

What is its length?

ALICE.

As long as is your lord's.

EDUNA.

Is it as heavy?

[*Giving her the sword.*]

ALICE.

Heavier much, methinks.

D

EDUNA.

Go to ! that is not true.

[Snatching the sword from her.]

GUTHRUM.

But one word more —

Is there no mark to know him by ? no scar ?

ALICE.

One on his forehead, cut by a Danish blade.

GUTHRUM.

Now thank thee, wench ! thou'rt worth thy weight in
gold ;

I'll find him out by that.

EDUNA.

Poor girl, she weeps !—Listen, sweet sister !

[Exeunt, ALICE leaning on EDUNA.]

SCENE V.

Danish Camp.

SEDROCK, SWEYN, and Attendant.

SWEYN (*to ATTENDANT*).

Boy! set Lord Sedrock's cup beside of mine, —
The feast is bearing in. (*To SEDROCK.*) I've much
to say,
And you are well returned.

SEDROCK.

Is aught amiss?

SWEYN.

The moat will ne'er be finished, for to-day
Guthrum has stopped the work.

SEDROCK.

A pest on folly! here's a careless camp,
Void of the smallest guard. Where is the King?

SWEYN.

He's with the Queen, I think.

SEDRICK.

Ah ! with the Queen — the Queen has all his time.

[*Turns to go.*]

SWEYN.

Sedrick, one word !

SEDRICK.

Ay, at the feast ; I must needs see the King.

[*Exit.*]

Enter First and Second Lord.

SECOND LORD.

Heyday, what news ? Sedrick is all on flame.

SWEYN.


He is our camp's right eye.

[*To himself.*]

FIRST LORD.

I heard it said

He and his foster son, whilst in the wood,
Had found the Saxons swarming like the bees
In hiving time.



SECOND LORD.

Well! let them hive—we'll smoke them from their
nest.

FIRST LORD.

'Tis very clear there's something fresh astir.

SECOND LORD.

This ripple on the calm betokens wind;
For me, I love a gale.

SWEYN.

Ay, but beware! for whistling after wind
Brings oft a bargain full.

SECOND LORD.

Let's to the feast, —
Come, come, my lords! they bear the boar's head in.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE VI

URBO's Tent — URBO and ALICE.

URBO.

Thy honour and thy beauty, both are mine,
And I could blot them with a single act ;
Nor Gods nor men could snatch thee from my grasp—
Thou know'st it, I could blot them.

ALICE.

It is not true.

Thou art a blustering storm, which blows its time,
But though thou chill'st my heart, yet thou art ruled—
There is my God, who rules thee !

[*Pointing upwards.*]

URBO.

What said you ? I—I ruled, and by thy God ?
What holds me now ? I'll ruin thee, by heaven !
—Yet, oh ye Gods ! it were a damning sin.—
Oh hear me, Alice ! for I feel half mad —

I am a fool, this love has crazed my brain—
They said my heart was rugged, hard, and cold—
They called me Norway ice, the iron Dane,
But she has burst the iron, crushed the ice,
I could e'en say, like to a palefaced girl,
That she had broke my heart!

[*Aside.*

ALICE.

Oh God, deliver me from this mad man!

UBBO.

Yet I have left, to take a full revenge!
Answer me once again, the third time, say—
It is an honourable love I offer thee,
Refuse and thou art doomed—answer me!
I'll keep thee here, or for revenge or love.

ALICE.

Yet hear me first; I am a poor weak girl,
And do deserve but little love or hate;
Be generous as great, and pity me—
I cannot give thee love—oh! let me go.

UBBO.

Yes, to be another's wife, and hugging him,
To smile and jeer at me, — a fruitful wife,
A breeder of more Saxon slaves, ha! girl?

ALICE.

To be a wife hope scarcely gave the thought;
It is a dream, and yet sweet liberty
Would be a bootless thing without that dream.

UBBO.

This blights me! I could have let her go but now —

[Aside — his features are convulsed.]

ALICE.

Still, wife or maid, happy or sad, or gay,
I ne'er could laugh or jeer thy name, ah no!
I will pray for thee, and will bless thee too,
If thou wilt make me free: —
And as for Saxon slaves, believe me, sir!
There breathes not such a —

[Looking up in his face.]

— Oh my good lord ! look not so terribly —
Have mercy on me ! I will, I —

[Kneeling to him.]

UBBO.

No, I will be most patient . . . another hour,
Yes, an hour more, before . . . Alice, I go —
Yet hope not to escape me !
I'll not have mercy on thee, never, never !

ALICE.

Oh God, protect me !

UBBO.

'Tis a useless prayer ;
I almost wish he could — so fair, so sweet !

ALICE.

Pity and let me go !

UBBO.

No, no ! you love another.

[Exit.]

ALICE.

I feel so strained by grief, I cannot weep.

[Kneels and prays.]

SCENE VII.

GUTHRUM's Tent—*Feast commencing*—GUTHRUM, SEDROCK,
and Danish Lords—ASKE, the High Priest, Danish
Harper, and Attendants—UBBO enters after the rest and
takes his seat.

GUTHRUM.

Pledge first the cup of Odin — fill the bowls !

[*Cups are filled.*]

Drink to the clash of arms, and drain the mead.

SECOND LORD.

The mead is dead, it is a gloomy sign.

THIRD LORD.

When, but an hour since, a bull was killed

To Thor, the priest could find no heart.

SECOND LORD.

No heart !

That is the worst response a God can give.



THIRD LORD.

In sooth, my friends! this bodes us little good;
Look! all the guests feel much perplexed and grieved,—
I will not drink.

[Sets down his cup.]

SECOND LORD.

The Gods are much displeased, drink no more, ho!

GUTHRUM.

Why, how now? what's amiss?
Cheer up, my friends! and look not so disconsolate.

SEDROCK.

My lord! whilst praying in the sacred grove,
The priests did find the ash that overtopped
Odin's high altar like a deity,
All warp'd and scathed, the branches torn away, —
It stands indeed, but 'tis a blasted thing.

GUTHRUM.

I heard no storm last night.

SECOND LORD.

I kept the watch, no storm disturb'd the sky,
The moon shone half the night.

GUTHREUM.

Black times are coming — Ha ! Eduna's dream !

[*Aside. The Lords whisper, but attention is gradually
drawn to UBBO.*]

UBBO.

By giving her to Odin, I shall burst
A chain that gnaws me with continual pain ;
She's like an arrow rankling in my heart,
And must be torn away, — how it will bleed
Is scarcely worth a thought. 'Tis strange I feel
More like a culprit than a patriot
In sacrificing for the Danish good
A simple girl . . . Yes ! to appease the Gods
It must be done. Besides, she loves another, —
She shall die pure as melts the morning snow,
And so farewell, cold Alice !

FIRST LORD.

See how he mutters Alice !



UBBO.

And well I may!

[*Rising.*

Fill me this skull, ho ! with yon stale flat mead ;
See, fools ! it foams and sparkles i' the hollow bone,
Giving new life to what has long been dead ;
Now Odin stands amongst us — List, oh God !
I offer thee the dearest thing I have,
And what I give thee must be wrenched away
From where my heart is set — she is entwined
And plaited to its roots — Take her, thou God !
And if in giving her, I do destroy
The sacred spark of life, Odin ! bethink
I sacrifice her in all holiness
That thou may'st be propitious to the Danes,
And help my brethren in the coming storm !
— Go, take the girl, priest ! take the Saxon maid —
I pledge to Odin.

[*Drinks — The tent is shaken by a blast of wind.*

GUTHRUM.

Noble brother !

ALL.

Thanks, valiant Ubbo!

FIRST LORD.

Ho, ho! his captive! 'tis a pretty gift.

ASKE.

Silence, blasphemer! hush, while Odin speaks—

The God accepts the gift.

— Thou art a blessing, chief! Fill high the bowls
To Odin and to Ubbo.

[They drink to clashing arms.]

Enter an Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

My lord! a Saxon harper sings without;

A listless throng of soldiers dog his heels,

Who now begin to wrangle.


GUTHRUM.

Foolish knaves!

ATTENDANT.

I never heard such stirring music, sir!

He would be heard by you.



GUTHRUM.

Well, bring him hither !

Our feast will pass the lighter for a song.

ATTENDANT.

I go, my lord.

[*Exit.*]

GUTHRUM.

And now let's pledge to Thor !

[*Drink to clashing arms.*]

SECOND LORD.

Pledge, pledge again ! lose not a moment's space,

The time is short, let drinking have its sway.

[*Drink.*]*Enter ALFRED as a Saxon Harper.*

GUTHRUM.

Well, harper ! whatsoe'er your name, be welcome !

If you can stir my blood, and make it bound

As in the fight it leaps, right welcome here !

I'm ready for a rouse — begin and sing

As merry as the piping wind that blows

Through groves of Danish spears.

ALFRED.

Bring first a cup of wine.

GUTHRUM.

You ask right freely for't — here, take my bowl.

FIRST LORD.

And drain it as you love your Saxon life.

ALFRED.

I'll give you first a pledge, — all join with me,
And I will drain the dregs.

GUTHRUM.

'Tis a bold knave.

ALFRED.

To every Dane God grant a worthy foe !

ALL.

Oh Odin, grant it !

GUTHRUM.

A very noble pledge !

This is the boldest Saxon e'er I saw.



FIRST LORD.

A little loud of tune, methinks !

DANISH HARPER.

Remember,

Here is a harp cut from a Danish tree ;
You do forget that I was born your Scald.

GUTHRUM.

Pshaw, man ! the Saxon shall play first, — begin !

DANISH HARPER.

I will resent it — I will rouse their souls !

[*Aside.*

ALFRED *strikes his harp and sings* : —

Unravel my saying,
Spake Elfhild the grey ;
Solve me my riddle,
’Tis clear as the day
To men who are worthy,
The brave and the free, —
Then mark well the saying,
And, Danes ! answer ye.

E

In the dusk of the eve
An eagle swept past,
Why scream'd he with joy
As he mounted the blast?
The wolf bayed the moon
As he roam'd at his will,
At the peep of the dawn
Why sought he the hill?

Look on the tumbling waves,
Seething and white —
Why do the dolphins play?
What speeds their flight?
When the north wind is whistling,
Boisterous and free,
Why beats exulting
My own heart with glee?

Say why scream'd the eagle,
Why roam'd the wolf so?
Why leap thus the dolphins,
What bids the gale blow?

Tell me, ye Danes !

Why sing I so free ?

Give ye no answer ?

'Tis Liberty !

[Lords shout and applaud.]

GUTHRUM.

Here, keep this golden chain ! — I guess him well,

He is so big o' bone, and yonder scar

Looks nobler than his crown. *[Aside.]* A word, Sir

Scald !

I know you and you're safe. — (A noble foe !

I can scarce keep from laughing with delight, —

Yes ! I could give him all that I possess,

So he would fight me now.) — Here, take my sword !

It is a gift —

DANISH HARPER.

'Sblood ! he will give him all !

[Aside. Strikes in and sings :—

Ye joined the song that Sewold sang,

When Norway's rocks in echoes rang

To the singing chief and the shouting crew,
To the whistling cordage and the clang
Of the disturbed seamew.

He stood to the helm, and poured forth his song,
“ Three joys of right to the brave belong ! ”

Ye joined the fight that Sewold fought
When 'gainst the Saxon foes he brought
Scarcely a hundred Danish men ;
Long was the fight and fierce the sport,
And our first joy was then.
Our second joy is quickly told,
We pillaged the church, and we bore off the gold.

Ye seized the arms of the gory dead, —
“ What chief is that with his hair dyed red ?
“ He lies on a couch of foemen slain ;
“ The ravens on his eyes have fed,
“ And tasted of his brain.”
The moon breaks through yon fleecy cloud —
’Tis he, ye Danes ! Sewold the proud.

Our last joy yet to the dregs we'll drain,
Yes! vengeance, vengeance for the slain!

Will this joy cloy? I tell ye no!

Vengeance, vengeance! shout again —

Dash down yon Saxon, ho!

[Throwing down his harp and seizing ALFRED — the whole assembly at the same moment rushing on him.]

GUTHRUM.

Back, madmen! he's our guest—Here, Sedrock, Ubbo!

Do you conduct this noble forth the camp.

SEDROCK.

Is he a noble?

GUTHRUM.

Yes, protect him well.

When shall we meet again?

ALFRED.

To-morrow.

GUTHRUM.

Thanks!

[Curtain falls on the confused attitudes of the feasters, SEDROCK, UBBO, and ALFRED making towards the entrance of the tent.]

ACT II.

SCENE I.

EDUNA's Tent — part of it left open, admitting a distant view of the Country.—EDUNA and ALICE, the latter being decked out with flowers for the sacrifice — two Serving-maids behind.

EDUNA.

Play not so silently with those meek flowers ;
Speak to me, Alice !

ALICE.

There is no hope, lady !
Weep not for me, — ah ! these are useless drops ;
Tears are the dew of hope, shed none for me ;
Besides, they are infectious, foolish things,
And talking of them makes my eyelids throb.

EDUNA.

Even the violets are tearless now,
The dew has left their eyne.

ALICE.

I blame them not, —
Your pretty heads shall grace my childish grave.

FIRST to SECOND WOMAN.

Pity, poor maiden ! she can have no grave ;
Her body will be burned beneath the moon.

ALICE.

No grave ! not e'en a grave ! Ah me !

[*Weeps.*

SECOND to FIRST WOMAN.

Go, foolish girl ! you've quite o'erthrown her soul.

EDUNA.

You have wept now, — it will relieve your heart.

ALICE.

No, no ! my heart is full, 'tis bursting !

EDUNA.

Come look upon the world — forget yourself —
Give me your hand — so, come !

[*Leads her to the opening of the tent.*

How sweet the sunshine and the balmy air

Breathe on this lovely earth! Kiss me, dear Alice!
— You gaze as if your thoughts were far away.

ALICE.

Look, yonder is my home — the village-green,
How distant yet how dear! See you yon cot?

EDUNA.

I see it — what of it?

ALICE.

It was my mother's, and your voice at times
Puts me in mind of hers, —
'Twas low and sweet, Eduna! yet i'sooth
She was both old and grey —
I was her only child, — and I am desolate!

EDUNA.

Hark to the distant sounds of childish mirth —

ALICE.

It is a melody I loved, but now
It grates my ear. — Lady, I feel drowsy,
Yet I would rather pray.

EDUNA.

Come, lie thee down.

ALICE.

So, so — and I will pray the while.

[*Sleeps.*

EDUNA.

Go, finish yonder garlands for her neck —
Here, take these lilies and yon daffodils,
They give a sickly scent, and I am faint.

[*Exeunt Women with flowers.*

— War ! I have look'd upon thee as a feast
Fit for the brave and free, — a noble game
Where players match alike . . . but now
I do abhor thee !
— Poor victim, she sleeps sound ! an hour more,
And this frail form will mix with sightless air ;
I cannot save her — she must die — she must !

SCENE II.

Danish Camp. — Enter SEDROCK, SWEYN, and First Lord.

FIRST LORD (*to SEDROCK*).

This sacrifice can scarcely be to-night.

SWEYN (*to SEDROCK*).

I hear the rites begin whene'er the sun
Sinks 'tween the western hills.

SEDROCK (*to SWEYN*).

See how his beams have shortened on the wall ;
The yellow light fades swiftly into shade,
And evening closes in.

[*To First Lord.*

What were you saying ?

SWEYN (*to SEDROCK*).

Know you if all's prepared ?

SEDROCK (*to SWEYN*).

All, I believe.

FIRST LORD (*to SEDROCK*).

Who will present the victim?

SEDROCK.

Ubbo, surely.

FIRST LORD.

Why, Ubbo — he's gone mad!

SEDROCK *and* SWEYN.

Gone mad?

FIRST LORD.

Ay, marry!

I saw him raving at the priest just now,

No one knows why or wherefore.

SEDROCK.

He is not mad, 'tis but his rough wild way.

FIRST LORD.

He foamed and tried to speak —

SEDROCK.

I'll seek him straight.

SWEYN.

Do so, I pray ; I'll marshal all your men.

[*Exit Sedrock.*]

A double watch is ordered for to-night, —

Know you the reason ?

FIRST LORD.

Yes, you know 'tis thought

More men are stirring in the dusky glens

Than we have knowledge of ; at set of sun

Scouts will explore the woods. — Good evening,

Sweyn !

SWEYN.

Walk with me to the guard, 'tis on your road.

FIRST LORD.

Willingly, — shall you attend the sacrifice ?

SWEYN.

I cannot, I'm on duty.

[*Exeunt.*]



SCENE III.

UBBO's Tent — SEDROCK and UBBO.

SEDROCK.

You spoil the frankness of your noble act, —
Why baulk you thus the sacrifice?

UBBO.

Sedrock! I baulk it not — I'll not be ruled!
Go tell your priest, I'll not be ruled by him.

SEDROCK.

Hush! this is folly.

UBBO.

And shall I stand and see her die by gasps,
Whilst slowly ebbs the sick'ning tide of life?
She shall be killed at once — I'll have it so.

SEDROCK.

The sacrifice must bleed — such is the law;
And as the life ebbs easily or hard,
We judge the omen well or gloomily.

UBBO.

Is't not enough that I have given her up?

SEDROCK.


Gifts given by halves are lighter than light straws,—
You babble like a child who gives a toy
Which he withdraws as soon. Folly, go to!

UBBO.

'Sdeath! are you my friend?

SEDROCK.

Yes, truly am I,
And as your friend I speak.—Ubbo! you know
A gift that's offered to appease just Heaven
Should be most freely given, or it is void
Of any power to reconcile or please,—
Beware you bring not curses on our heads,
Instead of blessings, by this act of yours.
Come, say no more, be guided by the priest,
And let the common custom take its course.
Death recks not of the pain which dying gives,



And Alice must die somehow. —

I hear, besides, the priest is much incensed.

UBBO.

I'm mighty glad! I hope he'll split with rage!

I'sooth I'm glad on't — it doth ease me much.

SEDBROCK.

In one word tell me, will you yield or not?

UBBO.

To hear the pale priest chuckling in my ear —

I'll see him first in hell!

SEDBROCK.

I give you joy of this your choleric mood,

But think it like a fool's.

UBBO.

Said you a fool's?

SEDBROCK.

'Tis like a fool's — I say it once again.

UBBO.

You are an old man, or —

SEDROCK.

I care not for your ors.-

[UBBO clenches his fist]

Raise not your hand at me!

What, strike a greybeard, and that one your friend?

UBBO.

Friend you are none! Age is your safety now.

SEDROCK.

Think you I fear your passion's idle threats?

Away, vain man!

UBBO.

Is this my long-loved friend?

My gorge is swelling, but it matters not.

[Aside]

Sedrock! you'll drive me mad.

SEDROCK.

Go mad and welcome

[Exit]

UBBO.

Sedrock!—he's gone!

Oh! what a dolt am I! I've choked his love;
I've no friend now upon this bleak wide world,—
I thought my life of toil had fixed one friend,
But now, behold! my friendship is a dream,
And all is cold as ice—I am alone!
— How sultry grows the eve—the air is stifling!
I'll after him.—Poor Alice!

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV.

EDUNA's Tent. — EDUNA, GUTHRUM.

EDUNA.

I know not why I tell you of such tales,
You care not for the like, and yet in truth
My heart impels me, and I must obey.

GUTHRUM.

Sweetheart! your voice gives music to the tale,
And I love music well,—say as you list.

F

EDUNA.

This Saxon girl, strangely she spoke and looked —

GUTHRUM.

She seemed to me a maid of simple air, —

What was't she said ?

EDUNA.

Sleeping, she murmured thus,
“ Oh God ! how sweet a home ! ” then, smiling, wept, —
For strangely beamed her joy through glistening tears,
While trembling lips but half obeyed her soul ;
Her face smiled like the rainbow thwart the storm, —
I watch'd her till she woke.

GUTHRUM.

And what pass'd then ?

EDUNA.

I ask'd her why she murmured in her sleep,
And if she was a-dreaming, — truth, she was,
And heaven was her theme. She told me all,
And, as she spoke, her eyes led captive mine,
Her voice was low and thrill'd me to the bone, —

She seemed not of the earth, for I felt aw'd ;
She stopp'd and all was silence, whilst I sat
Like one, who, long entranced by melody,
Feels still the music echo in the soul,
Though sound has died away. I raised my head,
And she had pass'd from sight.

GUTHRUM.

How did she bear herself when first she heard
That she was doomed to death ?

EDUNA.

Silence was kept
Until she saw my tears, and then she wept,
And grieved a little bitterly, — to comfort her
I spoke to her awhile—it was in vain,
But nature gave the drowsiness of grief,
And thus she fell asleep. Hush ! what is that ?

GUTHRUM.

That is the hymn to Odin ; I must go —
The sacrifice begins.

SCENE V.

Altar in a dark Grove — A distant Hymn to Odin continued from the last scene — Aske the High Priest, standing at the Altar, with attendant Priests — Danish Lords expecting the arrival of the Procession.

SECOND LORD.

I'm almost out of patience, waiting here.

THIRD LORD.

There the procession comes, — see you the lights ?

SECOND LORD.

I see yon torches flickering through the trees ;
How lazily they move !

FOURTH LORD.

The hymn sounds wild,
And fills the grove with song.

SECOND LORD.

At last they come !
The glowing sky still pales their torchlight much.
Who comes so fast ? Ah, Sedrock ! what's the news ?

Enter SEDROCK.

SEDROCK.

I have no time to answer idle questions —

Lord Priest, a word with you !

[They whisper.]

FIRST LORD.

How flushed he looks ! sure something's gone amiss !

THIRD LORD.

He always fumbles with his gorget clasps

When something's made him crusty.

SECOND LORD.

And what's as true, he's crusty pretty often.

SEDROCK (*to ASKE.*)

Well, well ! there is no remedy —

I will present the sacrifice to you.

Ubbo is obstinate and will not come ;

I am his proxy here ; with this maid's death

He will return to all he was before.

ASKE.

This is provoking ! can you not persuade —

SEDRÖCK.

No ! by no means — (I'm out of sorts enough,) —
I've done my utmost. — Ah ! here comes the King !

Enter GUTHRUM.

GUTHRUM.

My lords, good eve ! How nobly sounds the hymn !
Shame on ye ! join the chorus like true Danes.

*Enter, nearly at the same moment, and from the opposite side,
the Procession, ALICE in the midst ; she is led round the
Stage and placed on a Throne, while the Invocatory Hymn
to Odin is sung by the whole Army.*

Odin ! Valhalla's halls
Are filled by our fathers' shades ;
Odin ! look round its walls,
They're lighted by Danish blades !
Upon the earth look ! see —
This army worships thee
With sacrifice and song ;
Tarry not long —

Approve and come !

Come, Odin, come !

*The Hymn sinks into supplicatory recitative, while ASKE prays
before the Altar. During this,*

Enter a Soldier, from the same side as GUTHRUM.

SOLDIER (*to SEDROCK*).

I beg an instant audience of the king —

I bear important news.

GUTHRUM.

What are they, friend ?

SOLDIER.

But scarce an hour from this same spot, my liege !

Where the dark wood grows high on every side,

I thought I saw the flash of well-clean'd steel.

I crept along the grass for closer view,

And counted well two score or more of men,

All arm'd with Saxon spears.

GUTHRUM.

'Tis strange, forsooth,
That they dare come so near.
— I thank thee, friend! go watch their motions well.

SEBROCK.

My noble liege, shall I —

GUTHRUM.

Hush! see you not
The priest awaits the maid? go lead her up.

SEBROCK approaches ALICE — *Music stops.*

ALICE.

Oh God, support me!

[*She is led to the Altar.*]

ASKE.

Come, maiden! blessed by the choice of Gods,
Approach with awe and fear!

ALICE.

With awe, not fear —
For Thou hast given me strength!

[*Looking up.*]

SEDBROCK.

Now to the Father of the Gods this maid
I dedicate.

ASKE.

To Odin she is given.

ALL.

Amen ! Amen !

Hymn recommences.

FIRST SEMICHOEURS.

Sound loud the crooked horn —

Odin, draw near !

— Is that some echo borne

Faint to the ear ?

Or is yon eerie sound

That moans around,

Mingled like trumpet's call

With waters' sullen fall,

The voice of Odin drear ?

CHORUS.

Of Odin drear !

SECOND SEMICHOEUS.

Make the strain'd trumpets scream —

Odin, appear !

— Is yonder flashing beam

That gilds each spear,

The torches' flick'ring blaze ?

Or is't the fiery gaze

Of Odin's bloodshot eye ?

Think ye he's hovering nigh ?

'Tis he — beware !

CHORUS.

Beware !

ASKE.

Take off these garlands — they but hide her neck,

And now are useless ; cut her hair away, —

It is too long and cumpers much my arm.

Bring me the knife — Prepare !

ALICE.

A moment stay,

Till I but say one prayer.

ASKE.

The time is past.

UBBO (*without*).

Make way, you hounds ! make way —

GUTHRUM.

Silence ! who dares —

Enter UBBO.

UBBO.

'Tis I ! 'tis I ! stand back, foul priest ! stand back,
Or I will make a sacrifice of thee !

[Dashes him back and seizes the knife.

Here Odin, God ! I offer thee myself,
As well as this poor child. Accept the gift !

*[Raising his arm.**Enter a Soldier wounded.*

SOLDIER.

The foe ! oh, I am slain !

[Falls dead — Tumult.

GUTHRUM.

Stand to your arms — be still !

Enter KENT and GODWIN at the head of the Saxons, driving the Danes before them.

KENT.

Flesh well your swords; we have them on the hip.

GODWIN.

Saved, saved at last!

[Rushes on UBBO, who stabs him, then draws his sword.]

UBBO.

Ha, ha! I'm now in my element!

[Strikes down another Saxon.]

Ha! ha!

KENT.

Proud Dane! I'll be your match.

[Exeunt, fighting.]

Parties fight across the Stage; ALICE meanwhile kneels beside

GODWIN.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Is that not Alice, our own village queen?

SECOND SOLDIER.

It is; go help her hence — I'll follow Kent,

I think he's caught a Tartar.

[Exit.]



FIRST SOLDIER.

Alice, rise up !

ALICE.

Oh help me, sir ! to aid this dying youth,
Help me to bear him hence !

FIRST SOLDIER.

'Tis little use.

[Rolls him over with his foot.]

By George ! 'tis Godwin — he is killed stone-dead.

— Why, Alice, girl ! your memory seems gone !

— Come, come, no talk !

I'll put thee under hermit Dunstan's care —

Come on before 'tis dark.

[Exeunt ALICE and SOLDIER. Saxons are seen retreating.]

SCENE VI.

On the slope of a Hill, looking towards the West — Time a little after Sunset — Beautiful Landscape. — DUNSTAN and GURTH, a wounded Soldier.

DUNSTAN.

Bring out my missal, there is light to read ;
We will make settles of these moss-grown stones,
The dew is not yet fallen.

GURTH.

I have not seen
A mist the livelong day ; the setting sun
Gave goodly promise of the morrow's sky,
And still the spotless beauty of the west
Is ambered by the painting of his rays.
'Twas such another eve I got my wound —
I think a month and more has past since then,
And I am weary of this lazy life.

DUNSTAN.

'Tis but a scanty week — patience, my son !
You are not fit to move.

GURTH.

Oh ! say not so —
Great deeds are doing, Alfred has returned,
The war is rolling on, — hush ! what was that ?

DUNSTAN.

'Tis but the distant sea which beats the shore.

[*Pause.*

— How sweet the hour ! now do day and night
Agree to bless the world with harmony ;
All nature borrows and all nature gives,
The waters gather crimson from the sky,
And borrow radiance of the beaming moon, —
The violet to the air her sweetness gives,
And still the humming insects from the flowers
Gather up honey ; all things now are softened,
And sounds but lately harsh grow musical.

[*Pause.*

— Yet always is the world harmonious,
Whether 'tis musick'd by the sunset sky,
Or chanted by the piping of the winds, —
Each bears with all appropriate part ;
The stormy gale sings treble to the sea,
Which thunders base, whilst lesser natures
Accord their notes, and give the universe
Perpetual music ; thus, even thus our earth
Joins the other planets in their songs — thus sings
The universe eternally to God !
— Give me the book . . . where I was reading last . . .
I have turned down the page. 'Tis strange old age
Dims so the eyes and dulls the ears' quick sense —
I cannot see the words. Here, take the book,
Your eyes are younger, do you read for me.

GUETH.

You know, my father ! I ne'er learned to read.

DUNSTAN.

True, true ! I had quite forgot. — The leaf feels damp,
The dew falls thick — come, let us seek our cell.

[GUETH *delays.*

— 'Tis but two days since you have left your bed,
And the damp air will do you injury.

GUTH.

This weary wound ! When will the time return
When, as of yore, I'll sleep beneath the stars,
And dream below the faint light of the moon !
The distant roar of winds among the trees,
The murmur of the stream and sighing sedge,
The flitting shadows and the fleecy clouds
Which chequer o'er the night, once helped my rest ;
My airy dreams mixed with the nightingale's
Sweet songs, my breath came soft and clear, my limbs
Were free — and when along the eastern sky
The dappled dawn was barred with ruddy gold,
All Nature bade me wake, and I arose.

DUNSTAN.

A weight of years will freeze the warmest blood, —
This is the case with me ; chill age in time
Will do the like with you. The night grows cold.

GURTH.

Hist, father! See you not two figures move
Upon the wood's dark skirts? They come this way.

DUNSTAN.

Look! are they Danes, my son?

GURTH.

No fear, no fear!

For here they come, a woman and a man.

Enter ALICE and First Soldier.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Good Father Dunstan! here I bring a maid
Whom we have rescued from those Danish dogs, —
She's very tired and, I think, not well.
Give her some food — for me I must be off —
What booty's going, I fear me, will be shared.

[*Exit.*

DUNSTAN.

Daughter, you're welcome to my hermit's cell.

ALICE.

The time is past!

DUNSTAN.

'Tis humble, but 'tis safe.

ALICE.

Till I but say . . I cannot catch your meaning.

DUNSTAN.

This is the weakness of the mind from suffering, —

Her smile is vacant, though 'tis passing sweet.

Poor innocent, sleep is thy surest leech!

Help her within, good Gurth!

[Exeunt.]

ACT III.

SCENE I.

GUTHRUM'S Tent. — GUTHRUM *arming* — EDUNA and *Attendants*.

GUTHRUM.

Alfred has kept his word. — This strap is weak,
You'll find another in yon broken helm.
You saw the Saxons then — do they come on?

ATTENDANT.

They line the western range of hills, my lord.

GUTHRUM.

Do they give promise of a tough day's game?

ATTENDANT.

So promising a sight I have not seen
For near a year or more.

GUTHRUM.

I am right glad.

Take down my father's sword — look ! there it hangs ;
Wipe off the dust, for it must serve to-day.

ATTENDANT.

I had half a mind, my liege ! to crack the scull
Of yonder Saxon Scald, who bore away
The sword you used so long — but that I thought
It might displease you.

GUTHRUM.

Saucy knave !

Look ! here's a speck of rust upon my shield —
What sigh was that ? Eduna ! are you here ?

EDUNA.

I have been here since you began to arm ;
Your wife is quite forgotten when you talk
Of how the war comes on.

GUTHRUM.

Sweet one, to-day

Each time I strike a Saxon to the ground
I will remember thee, — 'twill nerve my arm.

EDUNA.

The strongest arm is mortal and can die,
I scarcely think you know it. Give me here

[*To the Attendant.*

The sword you're cleaning — give it me, I say!
It is familiar, though my hand looks small
Upon so large a hilt.

[*Bending it.*

'Tis right good steel!

See, husband! I can tell when steel is good.

GUTHRUM.


No marvel, sweet! thou art old Sewold's daughter,
And yet the sword and you are strangely matched.
— But I forget the foe — Bring me my helm!

EDUNA.

Here — I'll brace on your sword. Be trusty, friend!

[*Addressing the Sword.*

Now look'st thou well, and like the God of war;
I love to kiss thee so! (*Embracing him*) Oh, my dear
husband!



GUTHRUM.

How now, Eduna ! you are not in tears ?

That were an evil omen.

EDUNA.

No, no — 'tis nothing !

'Twas but a moment's weakness—forget it, Guthrum !

Enter SEDROCK.

SEDROCK.

My lord, my lord ! I thought you were abroad,

But saw your horse champing his bit without —

Mount, mount ! the foe have gained the vantage-
ground,

And you are waited for.

[Exeunt.]

EDUNA.


My heart misgives me.

SCENE II.

Distant Chant of the Danes joining battle — Clatter of the Skirmish — ALFRED, KENT, Saxon Lords and Army.

ALFRED.

With Heaven and God above, our foes in front,
'T were needless to spur on a Briton born ;
Yet let me tell ye, friends and brothers all !
No second day like this will dawn again.
Now, foot for foot, and breast for breast, we stand
Against yon bloodsmeared Danes, — we fight right
fair ;
This day, if gained, makes us as free as thought —
This day but lost, and with a bloody seal
We close the page of England's history.
— Lose it — the foe will burst each cottage door,
Bear off your wives and murder your sweet babes —
But such things shall not be ! Those are the men —



Down on them! Whilst we live, let's on! When dead,
We can retreat on heaven!

[Saxons shout — Exeunt ALFRED, &c.]

*Confused roar of the Battle — Chant continues — Enter
GUTHRUM, on foot.*

GUTHRUM.

Thrice have I ploughed my way athwart the fight,
And, cheek by jowl, three times hath Alfred passed—
Curse on the press!

My red-roan steed is floundering in his blood.

[Fight on the Stage thickens — Danes retreat.]

What, Danes and yield up ground? Shrinkers, give
place!

I'll show you how soft-mettled are our foes.

[Rushes on the Saxons — ALFRED confronts him.]

Ha! Alfred, thou? my welcome's in my sword —

Thank God! we've met at last.

ALFRED.

Come on!

GUTHRUM.

Ha! ha!

*[They close, but are forced asunder by the movement
of the Battle.]*

Curse on you all! make way, I say, make way!

Alfred, I'm here! You coward, come!

[Battle rolls on against the Danes. Exeunt.]

Enter two Saxon Soldiers, meeting.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Keep to the right! the camp and booty lie
Towards the battle's right — Whither away?

SECOND SOLDIER.

I bear this flask of water to old Kent,
I fear me he's a-dying.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Stay awhile —
I've seen such marvels in the fight to-day!

SECOND SOLDIER.

Marvels! how so?

FIRST SOLDIER.

A cloudy figure rose
And led the foe, just as the armies joined —
'T was like a blasted God! and then anon

I heard an elritch yell ring in my ear,
And such a spectre passed! Look there, look there!
[Pointing.

Yon figure wears a cross upon his breast —
Surely 'tis good St. George!

SECOND SOLDIER.

I must to Kent!
The Danesmen rally, and the battle roars.
[Exeunt. *Battle continues to be heard.*

SCENE III.

EDUNA's Tent. — EDUNA and Attendant.

EDUNA.

Arm the old men — think you we'll idly rest
And watch the battle lost? Fetch me a sword!
I feel my Norse blood boiling in my veins —
I'll die with Guthrum, for I know he'll die
Ere he deserts the fight.

ATTENDANT.

My orders were —

EDUNA.

Obey me, sir! I am your mistress now —
Go bid each maiden who doth love her sire,
Each wife who loves her husband as she ought,
Each matron who hath sons, each white-haired man —
Even the widows and the orphans tell —
I'll lead them now, to die with all they love!
Said you the battle was quite lost?

ATTENDANT.

I fear —

EDUNA.

Speak out and tell the truth.

ATTENDANT.

I fear me, yes!

EDUNA.

Away, begone! and do as I command.

[Exit Attendant.]

Oh God of Alice, thou art in the fight!

[Looking towards the battle.]

Valhalla's halls to-day will be right full
Of noble guests, — And I will pour the mead
For my own husband, when he feasts with Gods!

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV.

Battle continued — SEDROCK and UBBO meeting.

UBBO.

It is a hideous truth — Sedrock, they fly!

SEDROCK.

If you meet any flying, strike them dead!
I fear confusion has spread through our ranks —
Rally them here — I'll to the central host,
Guthram alone sustains the battle now.

[*SEDROCK turns to go.*

UBBO.

Stay, Sedrock! if I lately have seemed cold,
And shunn'd a kind good friend — if partly pride,
And may be some slight shame, hath kept me back —

Forgive me! Count it foolishness of heart,
And not unkindness —

SEDBROCK.

No more, good friend! no more — I understand you.

UBBO.

I think it likely one of us may fall,
'Twas this that made me speak.

[*Exit SEDBROCK — Danes retreat over the Stage.*]

— Stand, cowards! turn—I blush to give that name
To those who once were men!

FIRST SOLDIER.

We are no cowards — we have seen such sights!

UBBO.

Sound me a rally, or I'll throttle you!

[*Seizing a trumpeter by the shoulder.*]

Louder, still louder! blow an' ye burst your heart!

[*Snatches the horn, and blows a blast himself.*]

Enter First Lord.

FIRST LORD.

We must make good the camp, — the battle's lost.

UBBO.

Are you a Danish lord and talk of lost?

Be off!

FIRST LORD.

—To the camp, friends! this man is mad.

UBBO.

Mad! feel the madness then — you coward, die!

[Cuts him down.

Who follows not, I'll do the like to him.

[Exeunt.

SCENE V.

Another part of the Battle—Battle continued—EDUNA lying wounded by an Arrow—GUTHRUM kneeling beside her, his Helmet off, his Sword hanging broken from his Arm.

EDUNA.

Give me your hand! while it doth rest 'twixt mine,
I am very happy. This is not your blood?

GUTHRUM.

It is indeed, indeed! your blood is mine.

EDUNA.

Grieve not for me, dear friend ! ('twill soon be past —)

'Tis but a shallow wound — see I can rise —

[Attempting to rise.]

But feel a little faint.

[Sinking back.]

GUTHRUM.

Eduna ! oh —

Why came you to the field ?

[Drawing his hand from hers, and putting it to his brow.]

EDUNA.

Take not away your hand, it gives me peace !

I feel my life is ebbing, 'tis a dream . . .

And all around me seems an unreal show . . .

Guthrum, where is your hand ? Husband, sweet
friend !

GUTHRUM.

It is between your own.

EDUNA.

I feel it not ;

Stoop down your head, so — let me see your face ;

I would die thus while gazing in your eyes . .

I feel a chilly calm o'er all my frame . . .

Say but one word, a word to break this trance —

GUTHRUM.

Eduna, leave me not ! One moment more !

EDUNA.

I am not mistress of this fleeting world,

Or I would stay for thee ! .

[*Faints.*

GUTHRUM.

She's breathing yet !

During this, Parties have been flying across the Stage —

Enter a Party of Danes, retreating.

FIRST SOLDIER.

The battle's lost, but still let's brunt it out ;

Chances may always turn.

SECOND SOLDIER.

I care not for the foe, and yet why stay ?

There is no use in dying like a pig.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter another Party of Danes, retreating.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Take to the woods, there's living there, my boys!
And bucks enough at hand — the battle's lost.

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter another Party, retreating.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Move on apace! look, there the swine-herds come!

[*Exeunt.*]

EDUNA *revives.*

GUTHRUM.

She may live yet! Look up again, sweet wife!

EDUNA.

I am — I . . . dear husband! — Christian . . Alice . .
God . .

[*Continues to move her lips.*]

GUTHRUM.

I do not hear!

Her lips still tremble, but she utters nought —
Speak one word more — one more! one more, Eduna!

—Who said a Christian? it was like thy voice!

—She's dead! — Women-slayers! butchers!

[Leaping up.]

Enter Saxons headed by EDMUND.

They've murdered her! I'll scourge them all to hell!

[Rushing upon and scattering them.]

EDMUND.

He has no sword!

Injure him not! seize him — he is their king!

GUTHRUM.

Seize me! Come, seize a storm!

[They rush on him again and overpower him.]

EDMUND.

Bind him with cords — See, he is raving mad.

GUTHRUM.

Kill me, I say! kill me! — Oh, Eduna!

EDMUND.

Let's toward the standard, come!

FIRST SOLDIER.

What woman's this?

How richly she is drest! Softly — I'll have
These pearls from off her neck.

[*Aside.*]

GUTHRUM.

Hell-hound! — If ye have hearts of men, look there!
She is my wife — quite dead — while I still live!
Let me but have her sweet pale face near mine,
And I will go as quiet as a lamb.
— Yet I'll find means to die.

[*Aside.*]

EDMUND.

Bear her along.

GUTHRUM.

No — touch her not! let me, for she is mine.
— Come, Eduna!

[*Exeunt, GUTHRUM carrying her.*]*Enter ALFRED, surrounded by his Lords, &c.*

ALFRED.

Now God be praised! The sun this morning rose
Upon a land of slaves — he sets to-night

Upon the freest people of the earth;
And by God's grace ye shall continue so, —
So long as ye serve him, so long be free!
—And now go count the slain! Brave Kent is one—
The Danes have lost their mightiest, but a host
Could not make up for him.
I go to take possession of their camp.

Enter EDMUND.

EDMUND.

Alas, poor Kent! he's dead.

'ALFRED.

Who said, Alas?

Mourn you for him who has left this grovelling world
To be with God? Shame on you, nephew! Come.

][*Exeunt.*

SCENE VI.

In front of the Hermitage.—DUNSTAN and ALICE—*Evening.*

DUNSTAN.

Daughter ! 'tis hard to tell whether this dream
Be but a wandering fabric of thy brain,
Or the good dictates of some spirit blest.
The mind will riot when the body sleeps,
Forming out substance for each wayward thought
Which care can bring on man. Thus wildering on,
It sports with joys, or, whimsically tost,
Whirls in some gulf of fear. One moment, thus,
'Twill build bright visions on a rainbow's arch
Which Hope rears high as heaven, —a moment more,
The thought rolls on, and sinks as low as hell.
—'Tis so, sweet child ! Natheless, this dream of thine
Has much connection in it, —
Along the blasted heath, so did you say,
To-night the fairies would bear Ulf to hell ;
At midnight, if you stood upon the wold

And crossed their path, you might deliver him —

Ran it not so?

— My memory fails me much; what eve is this?

ALICE.

'Tis Hallowe'en, I think.

DUNSTAN.

Ah, Hallowe'en!

ALICE.

Father! why look you pale?

DUNSTAN.

The dream is true!

[Pause.

— Full seventy years ago, when a young child,
I've known my sire, when this same night came round,
Crouch o'er the hearth, and while the blast swept by,
Bearing the echo of some distant scream,
Whisper us thus, — " Ever upon this night
" Spirits do stir and wander o'er the earth;
" Therefore, beware! — Children, keep near the blaze
" Of your own fireside, cross not your door's threshold!
" For ye may meet the Night-hag as she roams,

“ Or fairies bound to hell,— for at the end
“ Of each seven years they pay a tine to Hell : —
“ Then let the nighted traveller spur apace,
“ As the wild evening shadows settle down ;
“ If he but meet the fairies’ grisly crew —
“ Woe to his soul ! they’ll pay their debt with him ! ”
— Shuddering, we cowered nearer to the flames,
And, as the storm swept on, we bless’d ourselves
That we were safe at home. — Ah me, ’tis long ago !

ALICE.

If it be true, then I will rescue him.

DUNSTAN.

Alice ! you know not what the danger is.

ALICE.

Love can spoil danger of her terror’s strength ;
Father, I will save him !

DUNSTAN.

Yet bethink thee well !

It is an awful path you’d venture on —
Is there no worldly love,

No taint of selfishness in what you purpose?
Have you made any sacrifice to God
To gain his help?

ALICE.

Father! my love of earth
Will soon be cloistered in a convent's shade, —
This hath cost tears, but now they've passed away.
Three days ago seem now a many years,
In which griefs, crosses, deadly fears and pains
Have made me long for rest. — I'll be a nun,
But I will rescue first his soul from hell!

DUNSTAN (*after a pause*).

Then be it so!
If you will take this fearful task on you,
(And sure the dream's from God!)
I will at least support you to the spot,
And teach you how to act. Here is a cross, —
'Tis part of the true tree, and hath all power
To scare the evil brood; bear it with you,
But hide it in your breast till Ulf ride past,

Then raise it up on high, and at the sight
Unchristened spirits will shudder and fly far.
Take it and prosper ! I will go and pray ;
To-night I'll meet thee here.

SCENE VII.

*Vaults of Glastonbury Abbey—A Light burning—Stone Table
and Stool—GUTHRUM seated, his face sullenly averted.*

Enter ALFRED and Attendant.

ATTENDANT.

In truth, my liege ! the holy man spoke much,
And showed how all the heathen gods were false ;
He was convincing, —yet, 'tis very strange,
The prisoner hath not moved himself an inch,
Nor raised his head, nor spoke a single word,
Since first he sat him down, — he breathes heavily,
Or one might call him dead.

ALFRED.

Leave us alone,

And let me hear thee going.

[Exit Attendant.]

—Guthrum! Alfred will wait till you give ear
In soberness to what he has to say.

[Pause.]

—A noble soul mopes not when griefs throng round,
But stems and hurls them back.

[Pause.]

You do me wrong
To treat me thus. As foe you loved me well;
Treat me as nobly now I'd be your friend.

[Pause.]

—What, silent still?

Then, spite of silence, I will speak right out
What I have got to say. You have lost all —
Your Gods, if they be Gods, have turn'd their backs,
And left your nation blasted to the roots;
Serve them no more — defy them to their teeth —
Become a Christian! and this very hour

My people shall share England with your Danes,
And I will cleave my crown and give thee half!

GUTHRUM.

'Sdeath! will you taunt me thus? And do ye think
A crown—a better God—a heaven—
Even Eduna's life, could make amends
For honour lost?—Yes, every word I hear
With patience from thy mouth heaps my disgrace,
And drives me farther from Valhalla's hall.
—Eduna! I shall see thee now no more!
—Yet there's one way! Take that, thou Saxon hound!
[Leaps up and strikes ALFRED.]
Coward! why draw you not? defend thyself.

ALFRED.

Guthrum! it is not generous to strike me.

GUTHRUM.

Are you a soldier and endure a blow?
Kill me, I say!—Alfred, I saved thy life—
Oh! do me this good deed; give me at least
Thy sword, and let me do it for myself!

[ALFRED offers to speak.]

— Give me not words—thy sword, thy sword, I say!
You will not? well—

[Sinks back into his seat.]

ALFRED.

I fear, it is in vain.

[Aside.]

Guthrum! I will return at dawn of day;
Till then I'll pray God for thee.

[Exit.]

GUTHRUM (*after a pause*).

“Serve them no more”—“Defy them to the teeth”—
“Become a Christian”—thus?

[The bell tolls twelve. Slowly raises his head and rises.]

— Ring out, ye drowsy peals! the dirge of hours,
And let the soft-down'd wings of fleeting time
Bear on to dark oblivion what has passed!
My life's stain'd records blot from out your page,
That e'en the Gods may know not what is writ!
— Oh! how this world fades like the melting
 mists,
Like flitting moonshine or like wreathed clouds,

With all its brilliant deeds, its storms and crimes,
Its puppets and its pleasures, phantoms, fools —
Which now, like sable sand or sunny motes,
Crowd o'er its chequered scene : — ay, let it go !
For life is not reality ; 'tis but the shade
Of something yet to come —
The darkling image of the great To Be !

[Sinking down and relapsing into his reverie.]

— “ Your Gods, if they be Gods, have turned their
backs ” —

No, no ! this is degenerate and base !
— And shall I never see her more ? no more !
And must she wander through Valhalla's halls,
Watching and wearying till her husband come ?
And ever as some noble guest appears,
All fresh from fight, gilded all o'er with blood,
Will she put forth her sweet pale face and look ?
— 'Twill be in vain, Eduna !

[Pause.]

— 'Tis cold — my teeth are chatt'ring —
How dim this taper burns ! — ah ! what is that ?

[Enter Ghost of EDUNA.]

Is't thou? and in thy winding-sheet, pale girl?
Upbraid me not too deeply.

GHOST.

Odin is folly, Thor is but a lie;
Believe in Christ!

[About to pass away.]

GUTHRUM.

Stay, stay, sweet wife! oh stay — and speak once
more!

GHOST.

Guthrum, believe! and we may meet again.

[Vanishes.]

GUTHRUM.

Surely it is not her! she ne'er refused
The lightest boon I ask'd; her voice did soothe,
Yon voice did wring my soul. — I am a fool!
What have I shrunk to now?

SCENE VIII.

*A blasted Heath, half in gloom, half in moonshine — Two Ash
Trees in front. Enter ALICE and DUNSTAN.*

DUNSTAN.

We are now upon the heath.

ALICE.

The wind blows cold through these pale ashen trees, —
Look at yon falling star! — the north flames red,
As if the sun would rise beyond the pole.

DUNSTAN.

I've seen in distant climes the north pole blaze
And stream with livid light, as 'twere hell's jaws, —
But not till now within a Christian land.
— Yet fear not, maiden ; for within thy breast
Thou bear'st a sacred and a saving thing : —
Trust but in Him who suffered on this cross,
And he will shield thee from the powers of ill.
Remember my instructions, and take heed

You pass not from the shadow of these trees,
For they are hallowed. — Hark! the northern winds
Roar o'er the distant woods and bid me go,
And I must leave thee here. (The changing hue
Of yonder pale-faced stars, and the red moon,
Warn me they come, and tread the cumbered earth!)

[Aside.]

ALICE.

Oh God! how the ground trembles — leave me not
yet!

DUNSTAN.

'Tis the earth shuddering at the touch of guilt.

ALICE.

Stay yet! the stars
Do dance before me — give me your hand!
Courage, my heart! beat not so fast and thick —
Father! one moment more —

DUNSTAN.

Good angels guard thee!

[Exit hurriedly.]

ALICE.

I feel as if some horrid thing crept nigh,
And yet I see it not.

[*The form of the Monk reappears, hooded.*]

Why comest thou back ?

Why art thou hooded o'er ? and oh ! methinks
Thy face looks ghastly pale ! your eyes burn bright —
Hast thou seen hell ? speak ! I go mad with fear.

FORM.

And well you may ! Fly, woman, whilst there's time ;
Leave this broad blasted heath — they're coming thick !
Hark to the jocund owl's loud laughing scream —
Well sung, old bird ! I say — come on ! come on !

ALICE.

Whither shall we fly ? — You are so strangely
changed —
Come nearer first.

FORM.

I cannot ! seest thou not
The moon shines bright, and throws that ash tree's
shade
Right 'twixt thy form and mine ?

ALICE.

He has no shadow, and the wan moon-beam
Gleams through his sullen form — it is not he !

ELBITCH LAUGHTER.

Not he !

*The Figure shrieks, and throwing off the Cowl appears as a
Spectre — ALICE sinks on her knee — The Spectre dances
round her, singing : —*

Come through the grisly night

In frolics gay, —

For the Northern light

Fades away,

And yon blighted moon

Pales her ray !

Hark ! hark !

Our spirits come —

By the hum,

And the dark,

I know they come !

Reel away,
Through the grey,
Reel away !

[Dances out — ALICE continues kneeling]

ALICE.

Sweet Saviour ! thou who wert in agony,
Look on this fearful thing — look, look, oh God !

Enter two Warlocks.

FIRST WARLOCK.

Give me that skull,
I'll blow thee a blast
Will rumble its toothless jaws ;

[Blows.

Such music dull
Will gather them fast ;
Hark ! how the cranium roars !
[Placing the skull to the ear of the second Warlock.

ALICE.

What blearing sight is this ? I shall go mad !

SECOND WARLOCK.

Thou blowest it well ;
'Tis the skull of a king, —
As the battle-axe fell,
I heard the skull ring,
And knew 'twould sound well,
When summoning hell.

[*Wild laughter.*

ALICE.

How loud they laugh ! how horribly !
Oh what a scene of fear ! — thou blessed cross !

Enter First Witch.

FIRST WITCH.

We come, we come !
See how they come !
Look at the weirwolf there !
Ho, ho ! how he yawns,
And see how he fawns
On the prince of the air !

[*Wild laughter.*

Enter Second Witch (young) — addressing Third Witch outside.

SECOND WITCH.

Mother, here !

Why do you leer

On yonder sprite ?

Waste not the night —

Let's prance and dance,

Let's prance and dance —

Hurrah !

Enter Third Witch.

THIRD WITCH.

Make way for the Night-hag, make way !

She's wrapt in a cloudlet grey.

FIRST WITCH.

What art thou fumbling ?

Why art thou mumbling ?

THIRD WITCH.

I mumble for joy,

For I have been feeding

On the heart of a king,

And left it all bleeding.

Shall I tell you who?

FIRST WITCH.

Yes, do!

THIRD WITCH.

For once I'll speak true: —

The marriage-feast waxed loud,

The bridegroom king drank deep;

He was reckless, vain, and proud,

Whilst the poor did weep.

He saw not in the crowd

A woman grey and old,

With palsy double-bowed,

With fingers sharp and cold.

He raised the cup to quaff,

Then pride exposed his soul —

In his eye there was a laugh,

As he kiss'd the bowl.

An elritch yell! he groaned,

He bounded up —

He shivered and he moaned,
And down he hurled the cup.
'Twas I, 'twas I!
I crouch'd close by,
I bit his heart —
'Twas I, 'twas I —
Ha! ha!

Ever since that time
King Alfred's heart I've gnawed;
He was then in prime, —
Now his head is strawed
With locks of gray.
I must away!
I travel far —
My tooth is remorse!
All men feel its force —
Hurrah!

The Night-hag rushes by.

ALICE.

My lips but murmur, whilst my heart prays not;
I cannot draw my eye from those weird things —
God help me!

FIRST WITCH.

Ah ! who spoke that name ?

SECOND WITCH.

Give me yon rod
Of serpents entwined, —
'Tis potent to bind
The conscience in slumber,
And to fetter the mind
By magical number.

FIRST WITCH.

'Twas under those trees
I heard the voice sound ;
'Tis a maid on her knees —
She is gazing around.

THIRD WITCH.

I begin to feel sick,
And my pulses beat quick ;
When pure things are nigh
I must shudder and fly.

[*Exit.*

*Spirits, Witches, &c. rush forwards, and dance in a ring
round ALICE, singing —*

Dance round her, all thronging,

'Twill give her a longing

To mix in our revels —

Halloo ! join us, ye devils !

Sing along !

Swing along !

Join in the song !

With words wildly dancing

Her spirit entrancing,

All her soul stealing

Till her heart loses feeling.

ALICE.

Oh ! my brain is a-reeling !

CHORUS.

Thy heart loses feeling.

ALICE.

Oh ! I grow mad —

CHORUS.

Be merry and glad!
Like spiders we're weaving,
Thy senses deceiving.

ALICE.

Ah! the ground is all heaving!
—Ye seem all right merry —

CHORUS.

Yes; very, oh very!

ALICE.

My fear is fast going —

CHORUS.

Thy pleasure is growing.

ALICE.

I must join in your throng —

CHORUS.

Yes, yes! come along,
And take up the song —
Our wild notes prolong —

ALICE.

Your wild notes prolong —

CHORUS.

Here! take thou the rod —

ALICE.

Have mercy, oh God!

CHORUS.

Our charm is broke,

And ends in smoke!

Away! away! whirr!

[Disappear, shrieking and laughing.]

At this moment the Fairies ride past — Alice draws out her Cross—the Spirits fly in all directions—she rushes forwards and seizes Ulf, exclaiming,

ALICE.

Ulf! Ulf! thy soul is saved — oh God, be thanked!

*[The Fairies are scattered, and she falls senseless.
Scene closes.]*

SCENE IX.

Morning — Portico in front of the Ruins of Glastonbury Abbey.

ALFRED and EDMUND meeting.

ALFRED.

Where is our good old hermit? I long much
To see him ere he goes. I think 'tis said
He can subdue the pangs the body feels
By some sweet medicine.

EDMUND.

Oh! he is gone ;
He left the Abbey at least two hours ago : —
I pressed him much to stay, — argued the morn,
Which was as dark and stormy as might be,
For the great hurly of the night, but past,
Had left the sky all scattered o'er with clouds,
Which fled athwart the heaven, — yet he would go ;
He said he was expected at high noon

At Taunton nunnery, where a maid to-day
Betroths herself to Heaven.

ALFRED.

How is Guthrum?

EDMUND.

The hermit said, he's well.

Enter GUTHRUM, UBBO, Danish and Saxon Lords, &c.

ALFRED.

God bless thee, Guthrum! by thine eyes I read
Thy mind is full of some engrossing thought;
Hope whispers that the shadows of the night
Bore off delusions, and the dawning day
Brought with it too the freshness of real truth
To thy right noble heart. If this be so,
I need not urge thee to speak forth thy mind;
I know thee well, and that thou'dst shout it out
Were every demon that broad Hell contains
Here to command thee, Hold!

UBBO.

I'll hear no more —

Think you that Guthrum heeds thy oily words?
But for contempt, I'd strike thee on the mouth.

GUTHRUM.

Speak for yourself, Ubbo!—Stand back, stand back!
And let them see me well.—Danesmen and friends!
Before you all, in front of earth and heaven,
Ay, in the ears of Odin and his sons,
I here proclaim them false!
Odin! be witness that I am thy foe!
I own one God and Christ!

ALFRED.

I knew that thou wert noble as yon sun!

UBBO.

Can this be true? Guthrum! my own liege lord!
On my knees, King! cast back this false man's words—
On my knees, Guthrum!

[Kneels.]

GUTHRUM

I have told you once, good friend,
I am a Christian, and would have you one.

UBBO (*starting up*).

I'll have thee curs'd by all thine aged sires —
Vaulted Valhalla shall resound their curse: —
What! turn to grovel in a Saxon sty,

And be a Christian?

—Guthrum, thou living shame! thus I accuse thee—

I die, thou Nithering, a Dane!

[Stabbing himself.]

GUTHRUM.

Old friend! old friend!

UBBO.

Off! touch me not—I am no friend of thine.

ALFRED.

Danesmen! whom will ye follow? your young king,

Or Ubbo?

DANES.

Guthrum! Guthrum! We'll follow Guthrum!

ALFRED.

Great God be thank'd!

UBBO.

Odin, I come! — I die laughing!

[Dies.]

THE END.

LONDON:

Printed by A. SPOTTISWOODE,
New-Street-Square.

July, 1845.

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